

Sketch

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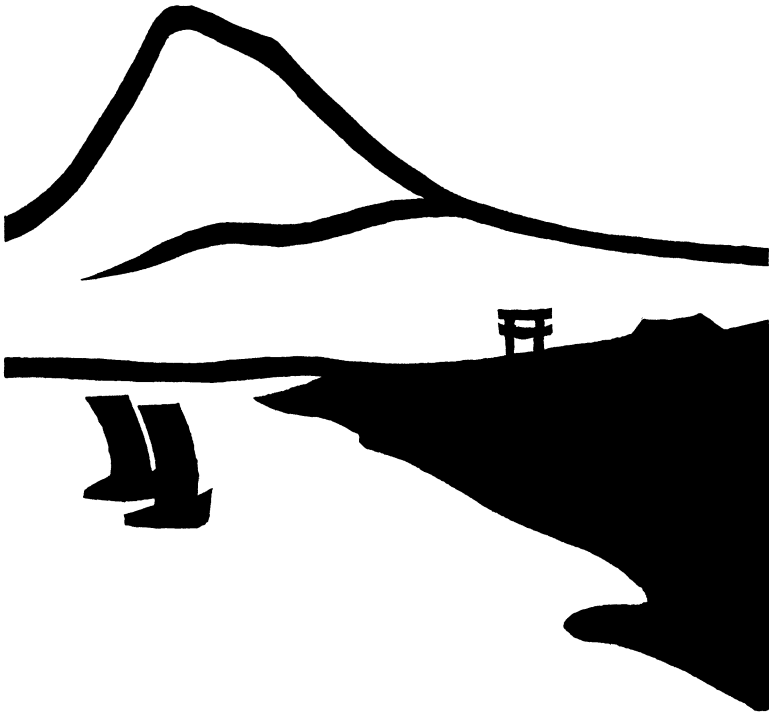
Article 14

Fragments of Memories

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Fragments of Memories

Tsuneo Tanabe

Dy. H. Sr.

I WATCH a young Japanese lady tie her brocaded obi just above the waist-line into a huge butterfly bow in the back. The coral ornaments in her hair quiver as she lowers her head to sip tea from a tiny cup she holds within the palms of both hands. Deftly she slips on her sandals, bows humbly but gracefully, and departs. . . .

I gazed at the huge embroidered wall-piece, a scene of wild

waves, white with fury, dashing on a rocky beach with a few gnarled pines struggling against the incessant salty spray. . . .

I watch grandpa draw up a straw-woven mat and laboriously seat himself beside the square stone brazier in the center of the main room. Into the brazier he taps the dottle of his long-stemmed pipe and inserts it under the sash of his gray patternless kimono. From one corner of the brazier he picks up a steel rod, stirs up the heap of charcoal, and extends his wrinkled hands over the glowing embers, closing his thin eye-lids in repose. . . .

I help grandma pick the mulberry leaves and stuff them in a huge reed-woven basket she carries strapped to her back. Carefully she spreads the crisp leaves among the trays of light-yellow silk worms, fuzzy little caterpillars with black spots. I watch them pierce holes through the green leaves, gradually eating them down to the ribs. . . .

I watch grandpa steadily, but oh so slowly, thrust his hand out to grasp a huge black and white patterned snake. I breathlessly watch his unblinking eyes which are focused on the snake's open mouth from which two long fangs play back and forth. Finally I watch him seize the snake just below the head, and I shudder as it wraps its cold twisting body about his arms. . . .

I go out into the bamboo grove with grandma after a torrential rain has passed and the sun is beating down. Wisps of warm steam shimmer from the soft, moist humus layer of the soil. I watch her push a knife about two inches below the surface of the ground to cut off the tender bamboo shoots we are to have boiled for dinner. . . .

I listen to a rubber-tired rickisha silently spin up to the gate. The coolie folds back the top and helps his customer gently down. I catch a glimpse of the shining spokes glittering in the sun as the coolie turns down the driveway and breaks into a steady, rhythmic trot. . . .

I watch fluffy golden pink clouds deepen into a flaming reddish-purple tinge as the sun slowly sinks into the deep blue waters of the Orient. The leaping colors in the sky are fading fast. The pale blue of the sky is merging into the dark blue gleam of the water below. The small fishing boats on the western horizon are changing from sunset outlines to dark silhouettes. Now I see only their bobbing yellow lights dancing on the black, lapping water. . . .